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"Much in Prayer": The Inward Researches of Elizabethan Protestants

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With daring rarely rivaled, European religious reformers in the sixteenth century repudiated many familiar rituals of Latin Christendom. They selectively and aggressively quoted the Christian scriptures to apologists for tradition, favoring, among others, the passage which said that faith—not solemn ceremonies or those presiding over them—could exorcize demons, even move mountains (Matt. 17:20). In fact, those reformers are now known for their consuming faith in faith. Yet despite their solafideism, none forgot that the statement suggesting the omnicompetence of faith was followed by one enjoining prayers (17:21). Theodore Beza, Calvin's influential successor in Geneva, conceded that faith could do little without conscientious prayer, so it comes as no surprise that Beza's most avid readers and admirers in England, while regretting the survival of prescribed and arguably "popish" prayers in their reformed churches, insisted on the importance of praying.[1]

They were "much in prayer," said John Geree in 1646, looking back on seventy years of religious controversy and referring to puritans, the most implacable critics of Roman Catholic worship and of its apparent comeback during Arminian ascendancy. They detested remnants of Catholic ritual, yet they ritually opened and closed days and punctuated the intervening hours, "in closet, family, and publicke assembly," with prayerful confessions and petitions. "Much in prayer," they "esteemed that manner of prayers best whereby the gift of God's expressions were varied according to present wants and occasions, yet [they] did not account set forms unlawfull."[2]

[1] Theodore Beza, *Jesu Christi Novum Testamentum, Theodoro Beza interprete* (London, 1574), p. 27r.

[2] John Geree, *The Character of an Old English Puritane or Non-Conformist* (London, 1646), sig. A2r. I use the term "puritan," as did Geree, to refer to reformers distinguished by their outspoken opposition to forms of worship and church government during the Elizabethan period but

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Geree's report is tremendously compressed. It does not explain why Protestants with pronounced faith in their election and with confidence in the immutability of divine will so relentlessly troubled their God with the contents of their troubled consciences. Moreover, Geree virtually elided the perceived incompatibility between "set" and "varied" forms of prayer, forgetting, it would seem, the prayer wars that set Tudor Calvinists against each other. In 1572, Thomas Cartwright, the standard-bearer during early puritan campaigns to reform polity, declared that reading set prayers or reciting them from memory was not praying. Nearly thirty years later, Richard Hooker complained that many reformed Christians still belligerently claimed that "prayers were no otherwise accepted of God than beinge conceaved allwayes newe, accordinge to the exigence of present occasions."[3]

We will consider some Elizabethans' reasons for praying and recover specimens from the controversy over forms of prayer, because we want to discuss how English Calvinists came to measure the authenticity of religious performances. They agreed with colleagues on the continent that worship was authentic only if it recapitulated practices commended by scriptures, current and uncontested among the earliest Christians. Yet some puritans argued not only that set forms and read prayers were unscriptural but also that prescribed liturgies promoted complacency and precluded candor. At a second level, then, a level we should call pastoral rather than biblical or historical, authenticity required correspondence between personality and performance—between grief, guilt, and longing lodged in the deepest strata of consciousness and the confessions, petitions, and expressions of gratitude constituting prayer. How far, at first, the art of prayer may seem from the curious fondness for dissemblers exhibited in the literature of the much studied English Renaissance! At a third level, however, the distance between late Renaissance literature and religious reformation is somewhat reduced. At the level we will call aesthetic—but only after a quick review of one relatively recent reconceptualization of aesthetic experience—the authority of prayerful performances depended on their fashioning petitioners' intense inward-

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also to refer to more moderate Calvinists who placed great weight on the revealing and consoling character of religious experience. I agree, then, with Patrick Collinson, who insists that "puritanism was neither alien to Protestantism [n]or even distinct from it but was its logical extension, equivalent to its full internalisation" (*The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [London, 1988], p. 95). Also consult, in this connection, Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London, 1988), pp. 5–7, 37–42, 239–41.

[3] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 5.26.2; and Thomas Cartwright, "Second Admonition," in *Puritan Manifestoes*, ed. W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas (New York, 1907), pp. 114–15.

ness rather than on their having reached and formulated what could be found in memory or conscience.

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Unless Christians "often repaire to the fire of praier," they will want fortitude to persevere piously in this chilly world. That statement, lifted from a popular Catholic devotional manual, appealed to Calvinists contemplating the Christian life, but Calvinists censured Catholics for praying by the clock, for prescribing times for prayer and limiting Christians' liberties.[4] Reformers suggested that faith freed Christians from the hour hand, from prescribed times but not necessarily from prescribed prayers. New liturgies developed in Geneva. Marian exiles adapted those and others for the use of English congregations on the continent. Prescribed prayers were featured as well in the Book of Common Prayer, the service book in England since 1549. Only the occasional critic conjured up the image of comatose Christians mumbling prayers with neither understanding nor fervor.[5] And such a critic could be answered during the early Elizabethan period by citing a fairly extensive set of home remedies. Edward Dering, Thomas Becon, and John Daye, to name only the most notable, had resourcefully been churning out formulae to prepare petitioners "in their families" for public worship and to assist "every Christen man to lamente his owne cause before the merciful eies of divyne majeste."[6]

Volumes stuffed with scripts for private and "secret" prayers attest that Calvinists thought it possible, if not also advisable, to lament one's "owne cause" in another's words. Thomas Knell released readers from the obligation of repeating his words, but he provided an exhaustive checklist of required attitudes and preparatory exercises, partly to encourage conformity and control the experience of prayer.[7] Prayer was too important to be left to chance. It was basic to the puritans' program to bring Christians "to greater feeling," "not only by doctrine but by experience." In prayer, an appreciable portion of that greater feeling was forwarded to God in sighs and statements articulating need and gratitude. Another significant portion intensified one's lament and led to deeper religious con-

[4] William Whitaker, *An Answere to the Ten Reasons of Edmund Campian, the Jesuit* (London, 1606), p. 257; and Francis Mere, *Palladis Tamia* (London, 1598), p. 88r, citing Louis of Granada's *Of Prayer and Meditation.*

[5] John Stockwood, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse* (London, 1578), pp. 117–19.

[6] Thomas Becon, *A Newe Patheway unto Prayer* (London, 1542), sigs. K3r–K5r, L1r, N1v–N2r; Edward Dering, *Godlye Private Praiers for Householders in their Families* (London, 1574), notably sigs. A3r, B3v–B4r; and John Daye, *A Booke of Christian Prayers* (London, 1578), sig. A2v.

[7] Thomas Knell, *A Godlie and Necessarie Treatise Touching the Use and Abuse of Praier* (London, 1581), sigs. B7r, D6v.

viction, namely, that portion of feeling or fervor lavished on petitioners' searches for signs of their election.[8]

The preachers' task was to remind parishioners of the plight of the impenitent; Egerton, Bownde, Topsell, and Pagit admitted they did so to inspire godliness, personal remorse, and rededication. William Perkins, the most influential English theologian and foremost "pupil monger" at Cambridge at the end of the sixteenth century, sketched the soteriological lines connecting preaching with personal feeling. He insisted that, once heard, the word must be "rooted." Sermons may stimulate a modicum of remorse, but Christians will ascertain their election and learn of their salvation only when the enormity of their sins "pierceth to the heart and taketh holde of the affections." The elect "feele continually the smart and bitternes of their owne sinnes." Quite possibly Perkins recalled Tertullian's description of prayer as a special kind of violence when he suggested that prayer was constant self-accusation.[9]

Calvinists would have been suspicious of consolation or soothing unaccompanied by accusing. Catholicism struck them as having forgotten that crises of self-confidence must precede and condition requests for grace and mercy. Perkins asserted that Catholics could not pray effectively; they were too arrogant and lamented as if their causes were just rather than lost. He alleged that Catholics looked to merit the kingdom of heaven, hunting for some entrance other than "God's mercie gate." Neither arrogance nor virtue would do. "Hee which prayeth truely must be touched inwardly with a lively feeling of his owne misery." Laurence Chaderton, Perkins's friend at Cambridge and master of Emmanuel College for nearly forty years, agreed that Catholics were doomed to pray ineffectively but departed from Perkins's analysis of their arrogance. Catholics, he said, were humble, yet their humility was only a symptom of "wavering faith," of doubts about their election. Doubts drove their futile efforts to earn their way to heaven, and doubts, according to Chaderton, kept them

[8] Dudley Fenner, "A Short and Plaine Table Orderly Disposing the Principles of Religion," in *Certain Godly and Learned Treatises* (Edinburgh, 1592), pp. 114–15; and Arthur Dent, *The Plaine Man's Path-Way to Heaven* (London, 1601), pp. 280–81 (on faith without feeling as "mere imagination").

[9] William Perkins, "A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation or in the Estate of Grace," in *Works* (London, 1616), 1:357–65. For Tertullian, see his *Apologeticum* 39.2 ("haec vis Deo grata est"). Also see the sermon preached by Arthur Dent at the start of his controversies with his diocesan (1581), *A Sermon of Repentance* (London, 1630), pp. 8, 27; and T[homas] W[ilcox], *A Discourse Touching the Doctrine of Doubting* (Cambridge, 1598), pp. 113–16. For other preachers' reminders and admissions, Stephen Egerton, *A Lecture Preached by Maister Egerton at the Blacke-friers, 1589* (London, 1589), sig. C4v; Nicholas Bownde, *The Unbeleefe of S. Thomas the Apostle Laid Open for the Comfort of All that Desire to Beleeve* (Cambridge, 1608), pp. 46–50; Edward Topsell, *Times Lamentation* (London, 1599), pp. 179, 213–14; and Eusebius Pagit, *A Verie Fruitful Sermon Necessary to be Read of all Christians Concerning God's Everlasting Predestination, Election, and Reprobation* (London, 1583), sig. B1v.

from serious self-inquiry. By comparison, Calvinists were confident in their recuperation and could determinedly "examine the very bottome of [their] heartes and rippe up all the inwarde and secrete corners of [their] consciences."[10]

Henry Smith was often seen and heard around Cambridge in the 1580s, before becoming London's most celebrated preacher. He was relatively unconcerned whether Catholics were arrogant or terrified. He concentrated on getting Calvinists to feel their misery more profoundly. He told parishioners who had become experts at exculpation ("sins and excuses are twins . . . we mince our sins as though they needed no forgiveness") that "backe-reckoning" was bloodletting; prayers were searching and bruising confessions.[11]

The premium placed on "a lively feeling of misery" may seem more intelligible to us if we remember that, for many English Calvinists and most puritans, predestination was primarily a component of what Thomas More, with condescension and contempt, called "feeling faith." It was only secondarily, if at all, a perplexing doctrinal corollary to the assertion of absolute divine sovereignty. True, theologians tirelessly labored to reconcile perceived human freedoms with the purportedly unconditional character of election and reprobation. The intricacy and complexity of their results would have made medieval schoolmen jealous. But Protestant pastors, if less systematically, no less persistently, urged parishioners to experience their election and God's favor, even in their anguish over sin and particularly in their remorse. In a letter "full of Christian consolation," Edward Dering succinctly commended a curious combination of dis-ease and comfort: "care not for hell," he counseled, "for the nearer we feele it, the further we are from it."[12]

Anguish, remorse, and repentance were ingredients for what puritans termed "godly sorrow," and godly sorrow was widely considered the first sign of sanctification. It was "first in appearance," William Perkins explained, because sanctification actually started with self-examination

[10] Perkins, "Treatise Tending unto a Declaration," p. 403; and Laurence Chaderton, *An Excellent and Godly Sermon most Needefull for the Time wherein We Live in all Securitie and Sinne* (London, 1580), sig. E6v. Also note Richard Rogers, *Seven Treatises* (London, 1610), pp. 32–33.

[11] Henry Smith, "The Betraying of Christ," in *The Works of Henry Smith* (Edinburgh, 1866), 1:414–18. Also see Daye, sig. A3v–A4r ("It is requisite there be no brag of righteousness"); Becon, H6r–v; and, on the difficulty of cataloging all sins occasioned by one's "owne heartes roaving motions," Laurence Barker, *Christ's Checke to S. Peter for his Curious Question* (London, 1599), sig. Q3v.

[12] Edward Dering, *Certaine Godly and Verie Comfortable Letters full of Christian Consolation* (n.p., 1590), sig. B3r; Perkins, "Treatise Tending unto a Declaration," pp. 409–13; Laurence Tomson, *The New Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Whereunto are Adjoyned Summaries* (London, 1576), sig. 229v; and Thomas More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answere* (New Haven, Conn., 1973), 2:742.

and was accelerated in prayer "by all other graces . . . more hidden in the heart." Edward Topsell, who had been at Christ's College with Perkins, looked kindly on the conclusion that bears directly on our interests: there could be no repentance without prayer. Hence, prayerful performances were not simply tremors or expressions of godly sorrow; they were its very source and mainspring.[13]

Godly sorrow was all important but not all that readily distinguishable from vague regret or mannered self-reproach. That was why puritans pressed their coreligionists to intensify their experiences of misery, to search ever more diligently for specks of sin, to "rippe up the inward and secrete corners," if they would find signs of their election. Every Calvinist would have known, in theory, that "slight and superficiall" sorrow was inadmissible evidence. Roger Fenton, preaching at Gray's Inn, maintained that prayer was no time for "sudden qualmes." They produced only what John Preston later and somewhat euphemistically called "vanishing purposes," amounting to a feigned rather than a steadfast resolve to improve.[14] Beza of Geneva fancied the apostle Paul's commendation of "godly grief" (2 Cor. 7:9–10) and contrasted it with a more vulgar and less intense sorrow prompted by fear of punishment (*dolor formidine poena territus*). That *dolor* or perhaps one of Fenton's "sudden qualmes" brought Hamlet's uncle Claudius to his knees: "pray can I not." Certainly it was not the sorrow that Lawrence Tomson, with Beza's gloss before him, identified as "repentance unto salvation."[15]

But could fear of punishment induce more profound sorrow? Nicholas Hemmingius thought so, and his exposition of the twenty-fifth psalm circulated in a London translation during the 1580s. Yet the unwelcome prospect of diminishing the distinctiveness of godly sorrow appears to have moved opinion in the other direction. On this count, as on many others, popular compendia prepared for pastoral use repay careful study. William Knight's *Survey of Theologicall Propositions,* for example, maintained that faith in God's promises wholly dispelled fear and whatever sorrows it had generated. Thereafter, a second generation of sorrows, sorrow "after a godly manner," accompanied authentic repentance. Thomas Wilson, rector of Canterbury from 1586 and for thirty-six years, defined "worldly sorrow" as disquiet stemming from our natural aversion to punishment. "Godly sorrow," he wrote in his *Christian Dictionary,* was an altogether different "greefe and displeasure of minde, which we feele

[13] Perkins, "Treatise Tending unto a Declaration," pp. 370–72; and Topsell, p. 253.

[14] Roger Fenton, *A Perfume against the Noysome Pestilence* (London, 1603), sig. B7r–v; and John Preston, *The Saints' Daily Exercise: A Treatise Unfolding the Whole Duty of Prayer* (London, 1629), pp. 133–34.

[15] Tomson, sig. 308v; Beza, sig. 238r; and Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* 3.3.

for offending God." Worldly sorrow feared God's justice. Godly sorrow presupposed God's mercy.[16]

Hence, petitioners did not offer the contents of their troubled consciences to alter God's will, to avert divine vengeance. Prayers were performed to change petitioners. The stakes were high. Hieronymus Zanchius, a Heidelberg theologian popular in England, reminded readers that changes could not be expected beyond the grave, that some Christians erred in thinking that friends' prayers and perhaps some postmortem payment or penance could transform the deceased. "Here life is either lost or gotten." "Touched with the finger of God's grace," John Phillip said in 1584, in his *Sommon to Repentance,* Christians return to God "like prodigall sonnes." As often as they prayed their confessions with godly sorrow to their supremely clement father, offenders turned into prodigals.[17]

The transformations have intrigued present-day observers, some of whom suspect that puritans "much in prayer" were actually redirecting hostilities: covertly, they hated God, but it was safer and theologically more sensible to hate themselves. Conjectures about such displacement feed the frenzy among literary historians who write rhapsodically about "experiences of dislocation" in Elizabethan England. They find "obsessive introspection" and dislocation nearly everwhere—in sermon, soliloquy, and sonnet. I will soon suggest an alternative genealogy and teleology of Protestants' "inward researches"; now, however, we need only free prayerful performances from the misapprehensions that have led too many observers to equate introspection with the "annihilation" of the self.[18]

Having promised that prayers would "rippe up all the inwarde and secrete corners of consciences," Elizabethan Protestants disposed those

[16] Nicholas Hemmingius, *A Godly and Learned Exposition upon the XXV. Psalme* (London, 1580), pp. 142–43; William Knight, *A Concordance Axiomaticall containing a Survey of Theologicall Propositions* (London, 1610), p. 510; and Thomas Wilson, *A Christian Dictionary,* 2d ed. (London, 1616), pp. 557–58.

[17] *Hieronymus Zanchius: His Confession of Christian Religion* (Cambridge, 1599), pp. 255–56; and John Phillip, *A Sommon to Repentance given unto Christians for a Loking Glasse* (London, 1580), sig. D1v, D4r. Also see Rogers, pp. 68–69; and John Bradford, "Godly Meditations on the Lord's Prayer, in *The Writings of John Bradford,* ed. Aubrey Townsend (Cambridge, 1848), pp. 173–80.

[18] For "obsessive introspection" and "annihilation," see Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 166–69, 179–80, 257–58; Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London, 1985), pp. 33–42; Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1986), pp. 98–102; and Stephen L. Collins, *From Divine Cosmos to Sovereign State: An Intellectual History of Consciousness and the Idea of Order in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 40–70. Psychodynamic explanations may be sampled in Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "Literary Reflections on the Puritan Character," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 (1968): 13–32; Murray G. Murphey, "The Psychodynamics of Puritan Conversion," *American Quarterly* 31 (1979): 135–47; and David Leverenz, *The Language of Puritan Feeling: An Exploration in Literature, Psychology, and*

who study them to see the self in one (or possibly in both) of two ways. It was either the object and victim of inquiry and indictment or an executive, integral, and rather tyrannical subject or impresario of literary and religious rituals of interrogation, inventory, contrition, and submission. But too rarely have selves been understood as dramatic effects, instead of as causes, of their performances. Precisely that approach invites us to reconsider apparent dislocation and disintegration and to make "ripping" part of prayerful Calvinist renovation and regeneration. Whereas authenticity meant correspondence between personality and performance to puritans and other reformed Christians at prayer, broader perspective on the cultural dynamics of religious expression shows prayers were not just formulations of agents' intentions or narrative traces of some psychodynamic process operating behind or beneath intentions. Prayers shaped worshipers as well as worship. "Much in prayer," the petitioner, "touched with grace," created and became a prodigal self.

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Thomas Playfere had grave reservations about his colleagues' devotions. In 1596, while prosecuting his unsuccessful candidacy for the mastership of St. John's College, Cambridge, Playfere preached on "the power of prayer" and against the "prety novelties" of puritans. He doubted claims about the stirring character of private prayer. Unless petitions were uttered publicly and in unison, he said, "that small spark of zeale which is in us may quickly bee put out and that little droppe of devotion . . . may quickly bee dried up." What gives Playfere's sermon its special relevance to our concern with prayerful performances, however, is its opposition to self-inventory and self-accusation. "We may look back a little," Playfere allowed, but too much memory hobbles prayer. Shame and sorrow "presseth down" and prohibit perseverance in righteousness. That is why the apostle Paul instructed Christians to "lay aside every weight and sin" (Heb. 12:1). If Paul had attended Elizabethan churches, Playfere added, he would have been distressed by reformed Christians doting on their vices. "All this looking to our selves is more than needs." It is self-indulgent; worse still, it plays into Satan's hands. Shuffling intently through a heap of shortcomings, the too scrupulous Christian would be

Social History (New Brunswick, N.J., 1980), particularly pp. 23–40. Extended treatments of psychology and Calvinist theology have direct bearing; consult John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford, 1991); and Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th–18th Centuries*, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York, 1990), esp. 505–57. Anyone familiar with Stephen Greenblatt's shrewd, seminal, and, I think, unsurpassed work on sixteenth-century self-fashioning will recognize the relevance of his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980) to what follows.

distracted from the practice of piety and dragged "into the new-found way of Puritanisme."[19]

John Freeman and Richard Rogers saw Satan's work very differently. Freeman charged that the devil was dancing Christians away from serious confrontation with their failures, tempting them to pray too little and to touch on their sins too lightly. Rogers anxiously advised that unvoiced and unprayed guilt and insecurity were the devil's playground. But the *Comfortable Treatise* composed by Robert Linaker shortly before Playfere's *Power of Prayer* anticipated and most forcefully answered the sermon's objections to pious self-absorption. Linaker acknowledged that scrupulous "backe-reckoning" could well turn many petitioners back. Lengthy accounts of reprehensible behavior could convince them that they were lamenting their causes in vain, that absolution was unlikely. "Pressed down" by the burden of sin and guilt, they would give up praying and thus take a fateful step away from God's mercy. If prayerful introspection ended there, Satan scored another set of souls; Playfere would hardly have had to belabor his point. Yet Linaker garrisoned his counterpositions with scriptural assurances, chief among them, Christ's summons to those "laden with sins." If those sins "lie upon your conscience like some little light feather," Linaker warned, there was cause for despair. It would indicate that confessors and petitioners had no inkling of the magnitude of their offenses, that they were unaware that they had offended against a father who had already forgiven them and would go on forgiving them. If they were not "pressed down," then, they might just as well give up. But Linaker celebrated the alternative. If sins "presse and hold you down as a wonderfull weightie burthen," there was cause for confidence.[20]

Godly sorrow and confidence or assurance were partners, and the partnership must regularly be renewed. Hence, there was a place for periodic despair. Without embarrassment, Linaker admitted that he sometimes settled in a soterial trough; "baren in prayer," he could only improvise "babling praiers," packing his laments with "such poore, drie, naked, and sillie stuffe, both for words and matter." Yet he concluded that dispiritedness and halting performances actually brought him closer to Christ, who had experienced "exceeding great anguish" only to receive and be revived by God's absolute assurances.[21]

Despondence like Linaker's recurred; it was expected. But it was also expected gradually to become less debilitating. Puritans particularly may

[19] Thomas Playfere, *The Power of Prayer* (London, 1633), pp. 2–3, 133–36, 176–77.

[20] Rogers (n. 10 above), pp. 448–53; John Freeman, *The Comforter* (London, 1622), pp. 229–30, 251–52; and Robert Linaker, *A Comfortable Treatise for the Relief of such as are Afflicted in Conscience* (n.p., 1595), pp. 6, 13–14, 34–35.

[21] Linaker, pp. 43–47.

have brooded too long over the sufficiency of their sorrow or worried too intently about some surplus of sins left unpardoned. At least, their critics thought them melancholic, grim, and gloomy.[22] A glance at Perkins might have helped those critics more meaningfully to draw the boundaries between disease and pious dis-ease. Melancholy must be taken as a worldly sorrow, wherein doubts and dejection could be traced to bewilderment over the character and extent of God's mercy. Perkins confirmed that the chronically melancholic Christian badly blundered. But godly sorrow steadied the attentive Christian's course, announced God's vast mercy, and stirred prodigal petitioners to pray earnestly and often.[23]

To the images used to convey the energy, intensity, and violence of prayerful performances, we need finally to add the favorite of William Fulke, Richard Greenham, and Nicholas Bownde. Prayer, they said, must "stirre up our selves." At times, they seemed to anticipate a purposeful frenzy. Bownde expressed this most memorably in a meditation on prayer which accused reformed Christians of praying too lethargically. Prayers "flowe from us like a still streame" and show hearts "senseless and dead . . . like a lake which is without motion." That was the problem. As for the solution, "our hearts in prayer must be working like a great ocean sea that sometimes cometh with great billowes so that it bringeth up things that are at the bottome of it." Prayerful performances should boast inordinate affections, Bownde implied, for "great billowes" were necessary if faults and failures sedimented in memory were to be dragged to the surface of consciousness and into petitioners' confessions.[24] They were necessary as well to overcome reason, which Bownde arraigned as the chief cause of "unbelief." Reason, after all, held that a just judge should never let the guilty go unpunished, whereas surges of sentiment rightly encourage Christians who "see [their] wants and weaknes" to believe the promise of pardon. Hence, billowing performances "stirre up our selves in true faith," as Fulke wished, "to depend upon God's promises and to acknowledge his benefites towardes us." We can only conclude, then, that influential English Calvinists would have prayer do precisely what Plato feared poetry might; they trusted prayer to stir passions and sympathies that would suppress rational judgment.[25]

[22] See John F. Sena, "Melancholic Madness and the Puritans," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 293–309.

[23] William Perkins, "An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles," in *Works* (n. 9 above), 1:284, and "Treatise Tending unto a Declaration" (n. 9 above), pp. 389–90. Also, in this connection, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.24.1 and 5; and R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 13–18.

[24] Nicholas Bownde, *Medicines for the Plague* (London, 1604), pp. 130–43.

[25] Bownde, *Unbeleefe* (n. 9 above), pp. 60–62; William Fulke, *The Text of the New Testament* (London, 1589), p. 297r; and "A Treatise of the Sabboth," in *The Works of the Reverend and Faithfull Servant of Jesus Christ, M. Richard Greenham*, ed. Henry Holland (London, 1599), pp. 360–61.

Rational judgment was no rebel against common sense. It was likely to find something absurd and "hopelessly contradictory" in sorrows that simultaneously pressed petitioners down, stirred them up, and afforded them calming assurances. Fifteen years ago, writing about the energies of the Elizabethan theater, Joel Altman glimpsed what just may be the "play of mind" which favored dramatically staged contraries not only in theatrical "interludes of extended quest" but also in prayerful "inward researches." On stage, the goal of the game or play was not to explain propositions but to "mirror minds coming to grips with a complex problem." In prayer, dramatically staged contraries fashioned and became the prodigal self.[26]

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A number of puritans did not think all prayers equally effective. Although Richard Rogers cannot be counted among them—he was no enemy of prescribed and read prayers—his diary records dissatisfaction comparable to that of the more implacable critics. It tells of a meeting in 1587, convened for "the stirring upp of our selves to greater godliness." All went well until one of the assembled volunteered an extended benediction. Then, "the stirring upp" ceased. Rogers's mind wandered. He deplored his inattention, confessing his chronic inability to concentrate: "I am caryed ether with drouzines and wearisomnes comonly at the praiers of others." Yet he also admitted his intolerance of those similarly afflicted: "I ill take it that others should doe so at mine."[27]

To outspoken opponents of "stinted, read prayers," boredom, bad enough, was but a side effect of bondage. They insisted that "devised leitourgies" with prepared prayers excluded impassioned impromptu prayer, inhibited the spirit, fettered it to formulae or to the personally meaningless petitions of others, and kept penitent souls from meaningful communication with their God.[28]

It is hard to make history of the controversy. We could point out that most Calvinists, many puritans among them, found, under fire, that they could defend both fixed and impromptu prayers. But radical and separatist puritans seem to have closed ranks against set forms. Still, the chronicle can easily get confused, for the dispute, at times, resembled more a

[26] Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley, 1978), esp. pp. 30–31, 240.

[27] *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, ed. M. M. Knappen (Chicago, 1933), p. 69; and Rogers, pp. 352–53.

[28] John Penry, *A Briefe Discovery of the Untruthes and Slanders against the True Government of the Church of Christ* (London, 1588), sig. A3r. Also see Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England from Cranmer to Hooker, 1534–1603* (Princeton, N.J., 1970), pp. 255, 268–73, 328–31.

tavern brawl than a tug-of-war. We have already heard Cartwright condemning prescribed prayers, yet he counseled against separatism. And we know from one source that some separatists in exile argued for the utility of fixed and formal prayer. To follow the issues into the next century is to stumble across fresh difficulties. With some finality, John Selden, sometime after 1634, reported that "the church is settled[;] no man may make a prayer in publick of his owne head." But Selden immediately confided that he "hoped wee may bee cur'd of our extempore prayers the same way the grocer's boy is cur'd of his eating plums, when wee have had our belly full of them." Could the church's "settlement" have been so inconsequential that remedy was expected to come with and from excess?[29]

Selden's preference for decorum during worship reflected concerns that developed during the 1590s. Thanks largely to two Essex ministers, John Greenwood and George Gifford, we have ample evidence for that chapter of the controversy. Greenwood's "Observations" mark the matter so plainly that neither Gifford nor we could mistake it. Advocates of impromptu prayer, he said, never meant to deny ministers' obligations to pray publicly about the "publick affaires of the church." About drought, delinquency, or dry rot in the bell tower, the minister spoke for the plaintiff. Yet Greenwood declared that it was impossible for anyone to undergo for another the intense and tumultuous experiences of dislocation and renovation which we may now associate with the ritual creation of the prodigal self. Parishioners must lament their own causes. "To lay forth our owne wantes and estate of our owne soule . . . cannot be done by reading an other man's writings, alwayes singing one song, customably repeating in superstition certaine words, our hearts never ripped up, examined."[30]

Greenwood suggested that one borrowed another's sorrow whenever one repeated another's prayers or sat silently during their recitation. He stressed that such parasite piety was profitless. Unless apologists for prescribed liturgies and set prayers could somehow paper over the differences between borrowed sorrow and godly sorrow, scripted performances could not be considered authentic prayers. Among separatists, that was the standard argument, which George Gifford thought both uninformed and objectionable. It was uninformed because critics overlooked conspic-

[29] *The Table Talk of John Selden*, ed. Frederick Pollock (London, 1927), pp. 103–4; and, for squabbles among separatists, Joseph Hall, "A Common Apologie of the Church of England," in *A Recollection of such Treatises as have been heretofore Severally Published* (London, 1615), p. 739.

[30] John Greenwood, "A Fewe Observations of Mr. Giffard's Last Cavills about Stinted Read Prayers and Devised Leitourgies," in *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow, 1591–1593*, ed. Leland H. Carlson (London, 1970), pp. 56–57. But see Patrick Collinson, "Towards a Broader Understanding of the Early Dissenting Tradition," in *The Dissenting Tradition*, ed. C. Robert Cole and Michael E. Moody (Athens, Ohio, 1975), pp. 13–19, for separatists' "conceived prayers"; and Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570–1625* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 160–64, 175.

uous similarities between scripted or prescribed prayers and sermons. Sermons were inspirational narratives, the words of others, which usually prompted "deeper sighing and sorrowing" than the most solemn statements originating in the pews. What Gifford found most objectionable was Greenwood's arrogance. He allowed that separatist critics spoke nobly about spiritual bondage and liberty, but he held that Greenwood and his friends had not imagined what their freedoms might mean to pious yet unlearned persons who could lament nothing without help. Leadership was more valuable than liberty to the unlearned. Without the prayers of a carefully trained and ordained ministry, perhaps Greenwood could send syllables soaring, give voice to godly sorrow, and gain assurance of election. But how, Gifford asked, might the unrefined Christians eke out consolation?[31]

Gifford harped on Greenwood's apparent disregard for guileless Christians for whom God provided the church and its liturgies. Worship in that reformed church did not make all petitioners prodigals. "Great heapes . . . of false Christians" still mumbled incoherently at prayer. But if it was unworthy of good Christians to cast out the wicked, as Augustine had argued against Donatist separatists in the fifth century, it was doubly so to cast off from the church to experiment with prayers and other practices. Gifford depicted himself as a second Augustine; separatists overrating the value of unscripted or impromptu prayers were Donatists *redivivi*, "ignorant blinde scismatikes, which imagine they knowe more than all the churches of God in the earth."[32]

Gifford himself was an outcast. He had been deprived of his pulpit in 1584 and was forbidden to lecture anywhere in Essex three years later. By the time Greenwood had registered his opposition to prescribed prayers, however, Gifford had been reinstated and apparently was reconciled to working for reform inside the establishment. In that, he resembled Perkins and Chaderton, whom he occasionally visited in Cambridge, moderates likely to have shared his interests in the unlearned who would have been lost without set liturgies ("the most are ignorant, weake, short of memory, dull and slow, and need all helpes to stirre themselves up"). They were likely as well to have shared Gifford's nightmare: "every frantike spirit" sounding publicly its private confessions and petitions would make a bedlam of every Essex church.[33] Like his Cambridge colleagues, Gifford

[31] George Gifford, *A Short Treatise against the Donatists of England whom We call Brownists* (London, 1590), pp. 22–25; but also note Hooker (n. 2 above), 5.35.2.

[32] George Gifford, *Sermons upon the Whole Booke of Revelation* (London, 1599), pp. 189–90, and *Short Treatise against the Donatists*, pp. 42–43.

[33] George Gifford, *A Plaine Declaration that Our Brownists be Full Donatists* (London, 1590), p. 105. Also consult Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), pp. 265–67, 405.

acknowledged the importance of self-inventory and self-accusation, but his position on the front line against separatism prohibited him from deploying the imagery of battering and billowing. Instead, he juggled the language of feeling with that of learning: "looke how much more a man feeleth in hymselfe the increase of knowledge," he wrote of the elect. As for the reprobate, they "feeleth . . . darkened in [their] understanding." Gone from Gifford are hints that Calvinism could have sanctioned billowing sentiment and delirious self-deprecation. "Every one," he said, "must come home to him selfe," but the homecoming was relatively subdued.[34]

George Gifford was one of several apostles of restraint. Increasingly, the adverb "duely" was prefixed to the expectation that prayer and meditation might "stirre the affections," and "the great want of sobrietie that is everywhere" in the 1590s was blamed on "overcharged" imaginations.[35] Yet without the intervention of Richard Bancroft, bishop of London and later archbishop of Canterbury, and Matthew Sutcliffe, the prolific dean of Exeter, cautions and complaints would not, I think, have acquired either the appearance or the momentum of a campaign. Sutcliffe was especially severe on "giddy spirits"; "ever seeking and searching," they made worship a farce with their "disorderly prayers." It was impossible, he alleged, to mistake their enthusiasms and "great outcries" for devotion. They and their prayers were "confused," "absurd," "vain," "tedious," and "without gravitie."[36] Nearly fifty years earlier, Thomas Becon remarked on "the roryng of the throte, the shakynge of the head, the knockynge on the brest" that sometimes accompanied spontaneous prayer. Becon dismissed the dramatic effects as "unfrytful," as "nothing."[37] To Sutcliffe, such special effects, impulsive "humming, sighing, and groaning," were ominous signs of the "raging desire of innovation" which could very well destroy church discipline and order. Enthusiasts "scarce know the difference betwixt Christian praying and bitter cursing." Sutcliffe heard anger rumbling through "extemporall prayers." He was contemptuous of fervency without understanding ("zeal without reason") but very apprehensive about fervency itself.[38] Zealots attracted crowds; their confusion was

[34] Gifford, *Foure Sermons uppon the Seven Chiefe Vertues or Principall Effectes of Faith* (London, 1584), sigs. E8v–F3r, and his *Short Reply unto the Last Printed Books of Henry Barrow and John Greenwood* (London, 1591), pp. 18, 70.

[35] S. I., *Bromleion: A Discourse of the Most Substantial Points of Divinitie* (London, 1595), pp. 382, 394–95; and Joseph Hall, "Art of Divine Meditation," in *A Recollection* (n. 29 above), pp. 161–63.

[36] Matthew Sutcliffe, *An Answere unto a Certaine Calumnious Letter Published by M. Job Throckmorton* (London, 1595), fol. 61r.

[37] Becon (n. 6 above), sigs. C7v–C8r, M4v–M5r.

[38] Sutcliffe, *An Answere*, fols. 61r–v, 80r. Doctrine as well as display divided the overzealous from their critics. For instance, William Negus, active in opposing Whitgift and conformity during the 1580s, shows how close to Pelagianism some puritans might come in their searches for assurance of election ("warrantable perswasion"). In remarks published after Sutcliffe's but prob-

contagious and usually seditious. A multitude, Sutcliffe said, "is more likely to doe anything then to reforme the church."[39]

Had Sutcliffe wanted to cook up a seditious stew of anger, "roryng" and cursing, he could have done no better than Edmund Copinger, William Hacket, and Henry Arthington. Copinger believed he had received special revelations from God, but he could get no one to take him seriously until he met Hacket, an itinerant preacher whose "extraordinarie" calling showed itself in his prayers. Hacket's "dexteritie in conceiving extemporall prayers" won Arthington over, and the trio decided to warn England of the doom that awaited unless the queen dismiss councillors unfriendly to the puritans. Soliciting support, Copinger importuned Job Throckmorton on the street and lured him to Hacket's lodging to hear the realm's new savior at prayer. Throckmorton would have been a valuable catch; he had funded and perhaps directly participated in John Penry's literary assaults on episcopacy. But Throckmorton, having gone along and having been subsequently lashed by Sutcliffe for the visit, professed that he disapproved the display from the start. Hacket's prayer, he reported, was "like the wild goose chase [with] neither head nor foot, rime nor reason." The sounds of Copinger's and Arthington's rapturous assent, hums and sudden groans, only made the performance more ludicrous. Throckmorton assured Sutcliffe, who assumed presence denoted partisanship, that he fled and never returned, but Sutcliffe would have none of it. He stressed Throckmorton's coming rather than his going. The very fact that Throckmorton could have been drawn to see Hacket "and judge his gift in prayer" suggested to Sutcliffe complicity and subversion. It suggests to me that reputations in the early 1590s could be made by virtuosity in prayer. Probably that was what Henry Arthington hoped when he took his stand against Archbishop Whitgift and challenged the prelate to a duel, "a combat of prayer." Arthington wanted to come before the queen and archbishop, pray first against himself, confess his sins and ask "that God's vengeance may presently consume me, both body and soule into hell for ever," if Whitgift "be not as deepely guiltie as I have charged." If Arthington survived the self-imprecation, the archbishop was "to fal down in like sort and make the same praier, that the like vengeance may fall upon himself, if he be so gilty as I have charged." Arthington promised that, if Whitgift survived, he would willingly submit to the hangman, but it was Hacket who went to the scaffold after a street disturbance in the summer of 1591. Copinger starved himself to death in prison, and

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ably uttered before, Negus suggests that Christians who do all they can to inflame faith in prayer will receive God's assistance in getting their confessions airborn and their petitions answered (Negus, *Man's Active Obedience or the Power of Godliness* [London, 1619], pp. 40–42, 137–42).

[39] Matthew Sutcliffe, *A Treatise of Ecclesiastical Discipline* (London, 1590), pp. 199–202.

Arthington, incriminating the others, escaped by abjuring his "conspiracy" and heresy.[40]

One of Whitgift's former students at Cambridge, Richard Cosin, took great pains to prove that Hacket, Copinger, and Arthington had not been madmen. They were sinister, not sick, real dangers, not just deranged renegades. Cosin, like Sutcliffe, was persuaded that billowing sentiment signaled rage against order. Be that as it may, the episode was used to discredit more moderate protests against Whitgift. Josias Nichols tried to reduce the embarrassment's effect. Cosin must have been mistaken, for the small company of impressionable fools must certainly have been "bewitched . . . by a mad and frantick spirit." Prominent among puritans in Kent, Nichols looked ahead joylessly to the hard choice that had been forced on him by those who saw subversive intent in every impromptu prayer, those, that is, who exploited the Hacket affair to press the case for conformity. Henceforth, Nichols must "administer praiers and sacraments by one form."[41]

Resistance persisted and gathered momentum decades into the seventeenth century with surges of interest in lay or "mechanik" preaching, prophesying, and impassioned prayer. Arguing for religious *exstasis* in the 1620s, Samuel Ward told his parishioners that "a Christian indeed is never right till he seeme to the world to be beside himself." But the Hacket incident left the likes of Sutcliffe, Cosin, and Hooker in the lead. Hooker flatly refused to consider "endles and senseles effusions of indigested prayers" "things of the spirit." Sutcliffe finally concluded that it was better not to pray than to pray "without premeditation, order, and gravitie." From Hertfordshire, Edward Topsell tilted with the critics ("without the spirit of God they speake evill of the things of the spirit, deeming our earnestnes in praier to be raving"), but to little avail. By 1600, John Darrell sadly noted that inspired prayer, which had been taken as a remedy for demonic possession, was routinely thought to be a sign of demonic possession. In prayer, as in late Elizabethan theater, what

[40] Antagonism toward Whitgift can best be appreciated in the light shed by Leonard Wright's tribute: "And if that grave reverend and learned father D. Whitegift now Archbishop of Canterbury had not stept in in time to withstand subtill and peevish devices, we had ere this daie felt as great hurly burly in the Church of England as was of late yeres . . . in the citie of Munster" (*A Summons for Sleepers* [London, 1589], pp. 22–23). For Arthington's challenge to Whitgift, see Richard Cosin, *Conspiracie for Pretended Reformation* (London, 1592), pp. 33–35. For Hacket's theatrics, Job Throckmorton, *The Defence of Job Throckmorton against the Slaunders of Master Sutcliffe* (London, 1594), pp. 23–27; and Sutcliffe's *Answere*, fols. 59v, 64r. Also, for details, consult Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 191–204; and Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 424–25. Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans* (n. 2 above), pp. 111–13, usefully assesses the immoderate tone of conformist pamphlets.

[41] Cosin, pp. 5–9, 73–75, 85–86, 100–101; and Josias Nichols, *The Plea of the Innocent* (London, 1602), pp. 31–35, 83–85.

T. S. Eliot called "the bombastic," the billowing and oratorical, lost ground to conversational and controlled *modi discendi.*[42]

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Soliloquizing characters on the Elizabethan stage probed problems of guilt and irresolution as assiduously, it would seem, as did some Calvinists, "much in prayer" and frequently, as Ward advised, beside themselves. Dramatists directed Hamlet and Faustus, to name only the obvious pair, to look within, with various measures of self-mockery, self-reproach, perplexity, and panic. And lately, literary historians have taken the scripts as symptoms of some crisis or loss of identity. Franco Moretti found speakers of soliloquy "painfully absorbed" in themselves, caving rather than searching inward and thus signaling the collapse of late Tudor civilization. Catherine Belsey alleged that the subject in soliloquy was so dissolved in signifying practice that twentieth-century readers, players, and playgoers discover subjectivity only as or after they project it on Elizabethan protagonists. If correspondences between prayer and soliloquy hold, however, observations of this kind may be less tenable. Of course, our evidence for prayer is partial. The most hyperreflexive Calvinists in England preferred unscripted prayers. We have apologists' explanations and critics' appraisals but not the voices of petitioners in medias res. But when prescribed prayers are added to the remaining traces of impromptu prayers, we learn of the importance of self-scourging introspection for one conspicuous constituency. In prayer, if not also in soliloquy, rummaging through one's woes, which surpass all show, and through one's uncertainties was the ritual precondition for regeneration. In prayer, if not also in soliloquy, "disjunction" and theatrical hyperreflexivity were hardly parts of what Moretti ascertained as a Tudor "dynamic of destruction"; they were stages in renewal, repeatable as often as prayerful performers were afflicted by doubt. Soliloquy and self-questioning sonnets were self-evidently art. Prayer was theology becoming art.[43]

As long as preoccupation with the beautiful was central to the exercise of aesthetic judgment, only delicately composed scenes of consciousness could pass both as prayers and as objets d'art. Donne's *Holy Sonnets* are

[42] T. S. Eliot, "Rhetoric and Poetic Drama," in *Selected Essays,* 3d ed. (London, 1932), pp. 37–42; Hooker (n. 2 above), 5.25.5; Sutcliffe, *An Answere,* fols. 60v–61r; Samuel Ward, *A Collection of Such Sermons and Treatises as have beene Written and Published by Mr. Samuel Ward* (London, 1627), pp. 39–41; Topsell (n. 9 above), p. 202; and John Darrell, *A Detection of that Sinful Shamful Lying and Ridiculous Discours of Samuel Harshnet* (n.p., 1600), pp. 50–51. Hacket, it seems, practiced exorcism to impress Copinger and Arthington; see the latter's *The Seduction of Arthington by Hacket* (London, 1592), pp. 14–15.

[43] Compare Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London, 1983), pp. 49, 70–72; and Belsey (n. 18 above), pp. 33–48.

excellent examples. When concepts of the sublime replaced classical concepts of the beautiful, aesthetic response to billowing sentiment and unyielding imprecations in some late Elizabethan prayer was, in theory, somewhat more plausible. In practice, prospects for aesthetic reflection on prayer are particularly promising now that fresh ideas about aesthetic experience have developed to accommodate avant-garde performances, what Max Kaprow called "happenings" and Michael Kirby, "activities." Those ideas happen to parallel major hermeneutic themes which put in question the received role or "humanistic tradition" of interpretation, wherein it is assumed that a work's meaning or meanings lay hidden, awaiting spectators guided by informed critics. The newer aesthetic lavishes attention on the plurality of perceptual responses rather than on preconceived standards. In some instances or happenings, performers' and spectators' unscripted responses are incorporated into performances that occasionally parody or offend against prevailing standards. Significance rather than beauty or sublimity becomes the quality of perception defining art as art. Yet without some structure or standard, significance would be as subject to perceivers' whim and wherewithal as was beauty or sublimity. Some who have contemplated the aesthetics of the avant-garde welcome plurality but not arbitrariness and anarchy. Kirby, for one, identifies significance with a profound change in consciousness—not just personal, perceptual changes but a cumulative cultural change in expectations and values. Significance, so placed in aesthetic theory, is something of a promissory note.[44]

To predicate aesthetic judgment on significance, on cumulative cultural change, is to make such judgment hypothetical. The maneuver seems to me to be part of the avant-garde's efforts to create contexts of appreciation for its various irreverent expressions, to disseminate confidence that emancipations in art will disperse in and change culture. Historians have advantages, looking backward rather than peering ahead to foresee significance and change. Still, historians cannot infallibly track the dispersions of art into culture. Evidence will not permit them, for example, to assert causal connections between prayerful improvisations of the prodigal self and staged self-analysis in late Elizabethan soliloquy (although that should not prohibit other uses of apparent correspondences). What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that sixteenth-century petitioners and their apologists emphasized change. Apologists pronounced that the strange mixture of sorrow and assurance completed Christians' searches for signs of

[44] Michael Kirby, *The Art of Time: Essays on the Avant-Garde* (New York, 1969), p. 53: "A work of art can be seen as significant to the extent that it tends to change basically the consciousness of man." Also note Kirby's discussions of "Activities," "non-matrixed performances," and "information structure," pp. 77–81, 155–57, 169.

their election, if only they would desublimate desires to prosecute and lament their causes before God. Success was registered by personal change, but as generations of puritan watchers have seen, desublimation often undermined Calvinists' attachments to liturgical, ecclesial, and social forms. Arguably, what started in practical divinity erupted in political dissidence, in programmatic assaults on worship, discipline, church polity, and, occasionally, secular government.[45]

But something curious comes to light when Calvinists' prayerful performances are placed alongside the aesthetics of the avant-garde and seen as rituals of containment as well as rituals of rededication. Prayers bear a striking prima facie resemblance to that species of avant-garde expression called "activity." Both "interiorize" art. Inward journeys are "intended for the introspective attention of the performer." Owen Watkins was right to remind us that prayerful journeys and particularly the puritan spiritual and confessional autobiographies they prefigured were "hazardous expeditions." Self-discovery, he noted, has since become "a conducted tour," relatively tame and predictable.[46] In fact, it could be said that much avant-garde activity tries to take the predictability out of self-discovery. But here, the resemblances between prayerful performances and avant-garde adventures are far less impressive. Even among apologists for impromptu prayer, there was no effort to equate authenticity with utter indeterminacy. The prodigal self was to be fashioned according to some generally known specifications. Restrictions or containments were not as severe as some have thought.[47] The creation and prayerful performances of prodigal selves still attest the virtuosity of sixteenth-century religious self-fashioning. Character and identity are not lost, as Belsey, Moretti, and others have argued; neither are they liberated to the extent that proponents of impromptu prayer had projected. Character is contained by what Leo Bersani, referring to fiction in the nineteenth century, terms "the exertion toward significant form," which "serves the cause of significant, coherently structured character." In prayer, confessions, petitions, and thanksgiving—the customary format—serve as beginnings and endings do in Bersani's analysis of fiction. They "provide a temporal frame in which individuals don't merely exist but move purposefully from one

[45] For example, see Michael Walzer's classic, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), particularly pp. 199–231; but see the exceptions studied by Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1982).

[46] Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York, 1972), pp. 14–15.

[47] For example, see Anne Ferry, *The "Inward" Language: Sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne* (Chicago, 1983), pp. 40–41, 51–53, 119–21, 171, 198–202.

stage of being to another"—from self-accusation to contrition and from godly sorrow to assurance.[48]

More concentrated attention to prayer and to the prayer wars during the late sixteenth century will make it difficult for historians of piety to postpone to the seventeenth century, the times of Baxter and Bunyan, the so-called devotional recovery in English Calvinism. It should also scale down, to some degree, the debts to Jesuit poetry and meditation that some literary historians insist on recording when they appraise the "inward researches" of Protestant poets. But my point has simply been that Calvinists "much in prayer" were not so much laying forth or laying out their innermost feelings as creating them, that reference to sorrow and assurance was predominantly productive rather than denotational. Apologists for impromptu prayer were dedicated to giving prayerful self-fashioning what Lionel Trilling called "rough concreteness." Those defending "devised leitourgies" became spokesmen for refinement and containment. On both sides of that dispute about authenticity and autonomy, however, theorists were committed to making every prayer a premiere screening of petitioners' prodigal selves.[49]

[48] See Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston, 1976), p. 55.

[49] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London, 1972), pp. 93–94, 99–100. Peter J. McCormick, *Fictions, Philosophies, and the Problems of Poetics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1988), pp. 131–45, gives a helpful discussion of productive or generative reference. Also see Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, Conn., 1954), particularly pp. 3–4, 22, 168–69, 182–83, for Jesuit influence; U. Milo Kaufman, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven, Conn., 1966), pp. 196–231, for "devotional recovery"; and, for subsequent generations of puritan contemplatives, Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), pp. 89–90, 284–87; and Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 178–83.